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ON ethnic MILWAUKEE

IN THE SUMMER OF 1853, 10 Belgian families anchored at the Port of Milwaukee after months on an unruly ocean. They couldn't believe their eyes. So big. So much space.

But it was the farming life they were after. They were on their way to find just the right land to start a new Belgium. A new Brussels.

And that's exactly what they did. In Brussels, Wis. (Door County), probably the most Belgian city in America, you are likely to hear local residents speaking Walloon, ~~an unwritten~~ language some believe is much like Old French, while they are walking down the street or sitting in a tavern.

I happened to meet Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Tureur while stopping for a rest at Earl and Kay's Place the Saturday afternoon Belgian Days was set to begin.

"I TELL YOU WHAT you better do if you want to know about Belgian Days and the parade we're going to have tomorrow, and about all the real Belgians who are visiting here," Wally suggested as he

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sipped a Milwaukee beer. "Go over to Ray and Jean's Bar right around the corner and you'll find six Belgians who are visiting there. They can give you the real lowdown."

Inside the bar Ray Guth was playing cards with a regular customer. Better let his wife talk, he said. She speaks Walloon. Behind the tavern storefront, Jean Guth sat in her living room surrounded by the six Belgians who were chatting furiously. I frantically recalled as much of my high school and college French as I could and found out I could neither speak nor understand a word they said. They giggled as I tried to pronounce their names and looked at one another quizzically when I came up with a French phrase I remembered. Something about putting the pencil on the red table.

Claire Courbet, a lovely young schoolteacher, could manage a little English and began introducing her friends. There was Edith Monmart, a nurse; Christian Drieot, a sound engineer at a television station; Jules Devilez, a train conductor; Francoise Lauvaux, also a teacher, and Michel Courbet, a house builder and Claire's brother.

Michel had been out scrutinizing the new model cars and trucks, so plentiful here and so unobtainable in his country.

"He is more interested in the cars than in the girls," his hostess informed me. "Cars, as well as about everything else in Belgium, cost twice as much as here."

UNLIKE SOME of the visiting Belgian's ancestors, many of whom settled in the Midwest, Claire and her friends are "not poor people."

"You could call these people wealthy," Jean said. "We met them when Ray and I were on one of our trips to Belgium, and every two years some of the Belgians come here and then every other year we go there. We're all members of the Belgian American Club, you see."

The group visited New York City and Washington, D.C., for a day. Door County, however, was more to their liking. Not only were they surrounded by some of the Midwest's most beautiful scenery, but also by people who could speak their language.

Yes, they like it in the United States. Taxes are too high in Belgium. Yes, the hotdogs and hamburgers and other American food they had eaten was just fine. But Americans waste so much, I was told. And have so many cleaning products. Claire said she used one soap for cleaning everything.

It is better, she added, to stay with an America family so you get a good idea of what their lives are really like.

"And to have people who speak the language," she said, "is so wonderful. The people are so friendly to us in this little town."

Jean told her that folks in Brussels were always like that.

On Sunday an hour long parade showed the visitors from all over the state their presence was welcome. Some people met cousins they never knew they had while others made new friends and promised to "see you next year in Belgium, God willing."

And the Belgians talked to one another about their experiences. It is so big here, one said is the best English she could muster. So much space.

Claire and Michel Courbet